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Getting to Grips with NTROs (visual arts data): The Role of Repositories and Libraries in Their Management

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This essay will comment on NTROs and visual arts data and the role of repositories and libraries in their management; examples will be cited from the literature.

By its very nature, research in the visual arts is highly complex and varied, often comprising a wide variety of outputs and formats that present researchers, libraries, and technology teams with many discipline-specific issues. Examples include sketch books, paintings, architectural plans, physical artifacts, and modelling algorithms. Additionally, the methods and processes that generate this type of research information are just as varied and complex. Research in the visual arts relies heavily on sketchbooks, logbooks, journals, and workbooks. The physical nature of research in the arts presents researchers and curators with significant problems with security and preservation issues while also greatly increasing the risk of data loss and deterioration. Appropriate curation and management of research objects/data in the visual arts is essential to

- satisfy funding requirements and demands for open access;
- reduce its lack of discoverability or loss;
- enable other researchers to test the reliability and validity of the data and the research method;
- enable greater impact of research and make tracking more accurate; and
- extend collaborative opportunities between researchers and teams working on similar and related projects to create new research opportunities.

IRs are primarily tasked with offering a place to manage and disseminate materials; a means for increasing an institution's visibility, status and public value; and a means for evaluating the university's research output (Rockman et al, 2005; Bonilla-Calero, 2013, Rumsey, 2006). According to **Rumsey**, an IR is an open access "searchable, digital archive of materials emanating from an institution, usually scholarly but not limited to journal articles, which are usually available in their entirety" (Rumsey, 2006). In Australia, by 2006 all Australian universities had established IR services (Simons & Richardson, 2012). According to **Simons** and **Richardson** the most common types of information stored in IRs is scholarly research outputs at 79%, followed by research data (Simons & Richardson, 2012).

The benefits of IRs include:

- centralising, preserving and long-term curation of an institution's output
- increasing visibility and dissemination

- supporting learning, teaching and research
- standardising records
- tracking and analysing research performance and estimating the impact of publications
- breaking down publishers' costs and permissions
- developing of value-added services e.g., statistics, citations
- identifying and measuring the degree of collaboration between disciplines

NTROs and the Institutional Repository

The literature indicates that there are very few IRs in the arts yet digital content in these disciplines are proportionally higher than in other areas (Cooke, 2007; White & Hemming, 2010; Gray, 2009). According to **White** and **Hemming**, while showcasing research outputs has been at the core of visual arts, its representation within an IR setting has its own unique challenges and is somewhat limited. A common thread in the literature is the role an IR can have in ensuring visual arts is perceived as a valid research output (Nadim & Randall, 2013; Gray, 2009). Some of the key findings regarding the arts' unique challenges were as follows (Sheppard, 2008; Cooke, 2007; Gray, 2009; White & Hemming, 2010):

- often involves multiple items
- produced through a combination of collaborative and independent work
- work already accessible online
- access management, notable when researchers are keen to promote their work they are worried about people reproducing copies
- quality of reproduction is a concern
- ability to capture size and scale of the work is complex
- collaborative works need to be recorded accurately — copyright complexities
- metadata and its ability to contextualise a work

A number of projects and initiatives in the United Kingdom (UK) attempted to address some of these challenges. In 1996 the Visual Arts Data Services (VADS) was established with the aim of promoting and encouraging best practice in the creation and management of digital resources in the visual arts (Flynn, 2009). In 2009 one of the major projects that looked into visual arts in IRs was the KULTUR project, which developed a model for IR start-up that aimed to address the needs of the UK Higher Education Arts Sector. It is important to note that prior to KULTUR, none of the UK's specialist higher education

providers had an IR. The aims of KULTUR were to:

- establish a model of shared practice
- establish a model for rights issues
- investigate metadata, preservation and curation of material
- ensure the IR is reaching out to audiences
- set up pilot IRs

It was identified early on that art research is practice-based and that the usual methods to measure impact generally are not suitable for this discipline. The most common works were installations, photographs and videos, with exhibitions the main medium of dissemination (Sheppard, 2008). An element of the project involved exploring a metadata schema for the IR model. When developing this schema, it was evident that various user needs had to be taken into consideration (Sheppard, 2009). According to **Simons** and **Richardson**, describing a work of art might be more effective if an extensive metadata schema is used as multimedia content generally requires more descriptive metadata than a book or journal article (Simons & Richardson, 2013). Some of the fields could include time period, dimensions, orientation, techniques used, style or period, cultural context, inscriptions, conservation treatment, etc. The KULTUR project was the first of three projects over a five year period — KULTUR, Kultivate and KAPTUR (Nadim & Randall, 2013), which all focused on the visual arts. From 2013 to 2014 an additional project came out of the Kultivate work, that of VADS4R which looked at the development of training packages for researchers in understanding the data and research outputs produced through visual arts research (Burgess, 2017).

Another project concerned with understanding NTROs was conducted by **Goldsmiths University**, which looked at what were termed "defiant objects" (Nadim & Randall, 2013). These are as follows:

- Non-text-based objects — associated with creative research and can include paintings, drawings, films, videos, exhibitions, designs, performances, textiles, compositions, scores, installations etc. IRs in general do not allow the proper recording of these items.
- Other text-based objects — text-based items that can struggle with conventional classification e.g., creative writing, pamphlets, exhibition catalogues, book reviews, translations, scholarly editions, grey literature, magazine articles, blogs etc.

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- Multiple/iterated objects — complexities between versions or the distinction between work and surrogates.
- Multimedia uploads

Overall the project had the following key recommendations:

- use common terms and descriptions
- include a glossary
- include additional metadata
- provide clear guidance

Lastly, one of the other key areas that came out of the literature was a need to ensure the IR appeals to the visual arts community. It is important to consider the visual impact of an IR if you wish to allure art researchers. If visual manipulation is not possible, customization could incorporate various plug-ins, creating unique layouts, customising metadata and changing workflows (Blankenship & Haines).

Conclusion

Visual arts research data and NTROs are valuable resources, and with appropriate curation and management, have much to offer learning, teaching, and research. NTROs can be characterized as tangible and intangible, digital and physical, heterogeneous and infinite, and complex and complicated. They do not always fit into the natural scheme of management. However, the development of policies, procedures, systems (IRs), and training can provide an innovative and flexible approach for these outputs. These approaches support appropriate curation and management of outputs to alleviate the issues surrounding funder requirements, elements of time and discoverability, and at the



same time improve the impact of research and create new collaborative opportunities for the institutes. NTROs should also be considered as highly as outputs generated from the STEM subjects. They may not be generating a new scientific discovery, but they are evoking discussion, making people think and showcasing a creative/visual side towards research. Therefore, they also need to be managed accordingly.

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The Charleston Conference is pleased to offer a new career service to conference attendees at this years' annual meeting, called the **Charleston Conference Career Center**. We at **ATG** are very excited about the **New Career Center**, organized by the innovative **Aaisha Haykal**, Manager of Archival Services at the **Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston**. The career center will have its debut on **Tuesday, November 5th 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM** at the **Gaillard Center** at the **2019 Charleston Conference**. The **Career Center** will also be held on **Wednesday, November 6: 5:45 PM to Friday, November 8 at 1:30 PM** in the **Francis Marion Hotel**. We have had many requests for such a service in Charleston. The **Career Center** will offer: 1) Handouts on resume building and cover letters; 2) Resume

and cover letter review by appointment; 3) General career consulting by experienced **Charleston Conference** attendees; 4) Posted job announcements; and 5) A place to post your resume/CV. This is our first year and we appreciate your help, advice and cooperation! <https://against-the-grain.com/2019/08/atg-newsflash-the-charleston-conference-career-center-debuts/>

Aaisha was also a **2018 Up and Comer Award** winner. This year we have **ten** new up and comers who were nominated and selected. **Erin Gallagher** <gallagher@ufl.edu> is our up and comer conference director. And guess what? **ATG Media** and **Kanopy** are **thrilled to announce** the third annual round of winners of the **Charleston Conference's Up and Comer awards**. Who exactly is an "Up and Comer," you ask? They are librarians, library staff, vendors, publishers, MLIS students, instructors, consultants, and researchers who

are new to their field or are in the early years of their profession. They are passionate about the future of libraries and the enormous impact library services have on communities around the globe. They innovate, inspire, collaborate, and take risks. We are particularly pleased to announce an exciting new partnership with **Kanopy** for the 2019 class of **Up and Comers**! Our friends at **Kanopy** will sponsor the registration costs for the top ten Up and Comers to attend the **2019 Charleston Conference**. The 2019 Up and Comers will be recognized in the **December-January issue of Against the Grain**, and these ten brilliant rising stars will be profiled in the same issue. They will also be honored at the **First Time Attendees and Up and Comers Reception** at the **Charleston Conference**. Here are our up and comers for 2019: **Meghan Cook**, University of South Florida Libraries; **Moon Kim**, Ohio State University Libraries; **Ariana E. Santiago**,

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